

PEARL HARBOR, 1941, APPROXIMATELY 0800 HRS

I have been ask many times what I experienced on that fateful day.

My position aboard the Battleship Oklahoma was in the third deck division. That is where we lived, ate and slept. On that fateful morning every thing seemed seemed normal. We had just finished our breakfast, the Marine detachment was on top side preparing to raise our flag, when all at once the loud speaker came on, I recognized the voice of our chief petty officer, he was saying in an almost uncontrolled voice, all hands to general quarters, all hands man your battle station, on the double, this is no s---.

At this time we all scrambled out of our quarters and headed to our assigned battle stations. Some of us headed for turret three. My battle station was on the shell deck near the top of the turret. This is a turret of fourteen inch guns. By the time we arrived there we felt the ship litterly jump upward, the first torpedo had hit below the water line, and as the water rushed through gaping hole the ship began to list to port (left) then the second hit and I believe the third. now the ship began to roll faster and faster. It was difficult to stand on the deck it was so tilted, Then we began to find our way out through an escape hatch at the bottom of the turret counter ballance. As we worked our way around the outside of the turret. The side of the turret was now horrizonal, and the deck was vertical (straight up and down) I was standing on the side of the turret and the water seemed to be reaching for me. I leaned forward, the water was right at my feet, I started to dive in but the water came up around me very quickly and I started to swim away, I had only swam perhaps ten or twelve feet when I looked back over my shoulder and the deck seemed to be right above my head, I never was a great swimmer, but under these circumstances I believe any one could swim, I know I gave it all I had. As the deck swept ~~me~~ .

As the deck swept past my feet the water seemed to rise like a giant tidal wave and engulfed me. I seemed to be twenty feet below the surface. I fought my way to the surface with my last breath and looked around for something to grab on to, and as luck would have I found a bamboo pole which I recognized as a pole used to hold seaplanes away from the ship to prevent damage to their wing. A short time later a boat came by picking up survivors, some one reached over the side of the boat, grabbed my arm and pulled me to safety. I just laid there in the bottom of the boat for a short time, then I sat up and looked around at the most devastation that I had ever seen, fires were every where, the water was covered with oil, I was covered with oil, the oil from the Arizona litterly covered the waters surface and was burning. ships all over the harbor were burning. Ford Island was a seaplane base it was hit very hard and was one enormous inferno. The boat took us to the submarine base which was across the harbor. We went into the wash room to try to wash the oil off of us, but to no avail, the soap had no effect on the black slimy crude oil that filled our ears, our nose and our hair. When it was realized that the soap was not working, some sailors came in the wash room with five gallon cans of aviation gas and poured about a gallon in each of the wash basins we were then successful in removing the oil and getting into a change of clothes. Later that evening I was transferred to an ammunition depot where we spent the night the rest of the night loading ammunition. I never saw one single person come off the Oklahoma yet I know most of them did survive. The rest of the story is world war two.

AL. Lankford

